if i was not myself and you were someone else

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John Clarence "Bucky" Egan, Gale "Buck" Cleven, Robert "Rosie" Rosenthal, Harry Crosby, Curtis Biddick, Marge (Masters of the Air)

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if i was not myself and you were someone else

by orphan_account

Summary

He reached up with trembling hands to straighten out the lapels of Buck's black and white suit while the younger man quietly fixed his cuffs links. They were close enough that Gale's cologne was making his head spin.

"If things were different," He swallowed hard and his mouth went dry with dread, but he had to ask. He had to know. "If there was a place where-where it didn't matter…"

He felt the blissful ignorance of the silence between them shatter like glass at his words. Buck froze in his movements. John's grip on the front of his suit tightened. He didn't let go when Gale tried to take a step back. He couldn't just yet. He could feel Buck's heart pounding through his pressed dress shirt and he closed his eyes to focus on the strong, now unsteady beats.

"Would you be with me?"

"That place doesn't exist, John."

Notes

these two make me ill and you'll never be able to convince me they weren't in love, so here is what i wish we could have had. also, this in no way should reflect or take away from the true feelings or character of the real-life men these two were based on. this is fictional. :)

also my username on TikTok is the same as on here and i have an embarrassing amount of edits for them on there and reposts.

Chapter 1: if i could see your face once more, i could die a happy man i'm sure

song i listened to while writing: all i want by kodaline

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If John Egan had thought he'd been spiraling before, it was nothing compared to the days that would follow Gale telling him that he'd proposed and Marge had said yes to getting married if they ever escaped this hell hole.

John liked women. He knew he liked women and never questioned that. Women were pretty, and he enjoyed the feeling and look of the female body pressed against his, and the man had spent many nights indulging in just that. But Gale… he had always found Gale, with his blond hair that always looked perfect even now in this dump and those bright, astonishing sky blue eyes pretty in a way that made his breath catch.

He chalked it up to the fact that Gale looked like he'd walked straight out of a major motion picture, and he told himself everyone thought and noticed that when Gale Cleven sauntered into a room. Or he tried to, and it worked most of the time. But it didn't work that night. There had been a lump forming in his throat that he couldn't ignore.

"So?" He had blurted out in the moment to the news of his friend's engagement without stopping to think how it sounded. The bitterness he heard in his tone made his stomach turn. He wasn't ready to face what that meant. Not that it mattered, as it had went unnoticed by Gale. For how close the two were a lot about how John had somewhat always felt, especially where Marge was involved, went unnoticed by Gale. And John had always been secretly thankful for that.

The younger blond man just stared at the floor with his eyebrows furrowed, and at first John had assumed he was probably lost in thoughts of his future wife. It had given John a minute to think of something else to say, to muster up some enthusiasm he knew he should have felt for his best friend, but he'd fallen short on words. "That's great," he added weakly. "Congratulations."

Gale hadn't replied right away, still staring at the ground. He'd eventually given a light, almost indescribable shake of his head and inhaled the smallest of breaths. "I was even thinkin' maybe you'd be my best man."

Those blue eyes then flickered up to meet John's with what looked like trepidation for just a second before they quickly fell back to the floor. His voice sounded strained and now, John realized and wondered why Gale also seemed to lack excitement for what should've been great news. It should've been the best news they'd had in a long time. He studied the man's figure that was slumped defeatedly against the wall and tried to read his mind.

He had wondered what would happen if Gale could read his.

"I will be your best man," John stated simply. There was no reply from Gale, so John quietly rolled over to go to bed. The silence between them felt thick with things John knew a man wasn't allowed to say to another man. Things he was almost sure would make Gale never speak to him again; things that would get them killed, especially here, and he knew that.

Flash forward to now, those unspoken things were eating John Egan alive. Even if he hadn't fully acknowledged what they were. He felt hollow. It felt like he was losing his best friend all over again and he'd barely survived that the first time. And, even though rationally he obviously knew it wasn't, this time nearly felt worse. Because Gale was right there in front of him, but he'd never felt so incredibly far away.

Which wasn't Gale's fault, but John couldn't help but be angry with him. He could feel himself becoming hysterical. He could feel himself reaching a breaking point. This all bubbled up, and before he'd known it he'd goaded Gale into hitting him to feel something- anything.

It had been days since and he could tell his friend felt terrible about the incident, but John had been avoiding him as much as possible without any explanation. Instead, he'd taken up spending time with a young soldier from a few barracks over whose name he couldn't remember most of the time, only caring for the fact that he bared a striking resemblance to his dear friend Gale Cleven.

The two men were out later than allowed one night, with lights out having been nearly twenty minutes prior. The risks of this were insurmountable but neither of them seemed much to care, which is something John also liked about Gale Cleven's lookalike. The man was just as reckless and unconcerned about his own safety as John was. Both spent their days and nights flirting with death in an effort to distract themselves from the empty holes each had in their chests.

Tonight, however, the flirting with death… it turned into something else. Something John had never let himself fully feel before. But now, it felt like John had nothing left to lose. He couldn't think of a reason to hold back what he'd felt so ashamed of, had kept hidden so deep down, ever since he'd met Gale Cleven.

He was suddenly shifting to purposely press his leg firmly against not-Gale's before he could think twice about what he was doing. The other man didn't move away, in fact he moved closer to John and pushed back. John's heart pumped hard in his chest, his mouth went dry, and he turned his head to find that not-Gale was already looking at him.

He was about to say fuck it, he was about to throw all caution to the wind uncaring and not thinking about how the consequences of finally

giving into this desire might be death. He was determined to not do much thinking at all, but then an out of breath figure veered around the corner of the barracks the two men had been sitting against and poorly hidden behind.

It was Gale. Once his eyes had settled on them he saw the redness of anger color the man's soot and dirt coated face.

"Are you a fuckin' *idiot*?

John couldn't helped the delirious laugh that bubbled out of his throat. "You know that a lot of people would probably say that, Buck, yeah."

Gale's lips hardened into a thin line. John could tell he was about to get berated like a naive child, but Gale froze with his mouth open before any words got out and he blinked with wide, confused eyes.

John suddenly became hyper aware of how he close he was to the man next to him, and how Gale was looking directly at the way they were slotted together shoulder to thigh and side by side in a way that was not normal for two men. He sobered up from his reckless train of thoughts that he knew had been brought on by hopelessness and scrambled to his feet. He then tried to dust himself off in an effort to appear casual and not as nervous as he suddenly was.

"Let's go," he snapped. He pushed past an unmoving Gale and purposely did not look back at the man he'd left sat on the ground.

A few seconds passed before he could hear Gale start to follow him, but John made sure to walk at a speed that kept distance between them. He didn't know what Gale had thought that was and didn't want to see the disgust that might be on his friends face if he had put

the pieces together. John didn't even want to put the pieces together himself and he wouldn't be able to explain what that had been if Gale asked. He didn't know how.

Neither uttered a word as they made their way back to their barrack.

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He avoids Gale now even more than before but it isn't as hard this time around because it seems like Gale is avoiding him, too. The fact guts him. It makes him feel small like the gum on the bottom of someone's shoe. John Egan was an egotistical and eccentric man, or at least that's the reputation he had built for himself. He didn't know how to be small. But at this point, he was a shell of a human being.

John Egan wanted more trouble, he wanted something or anything that would make him feel even slightly alive, even if it was pain. And John Egan almost always got what he wanted, so he finds it.

He doesn't remember how he managed to piss the two random POWs off so badly, but next thing he knows he's curled in a ball on the ground getting the absolute shit kicked out of him from both sides. He's laughing, outraging the men even more, who then start to beat on him even harder. There's pain radiating from every part of his body and he revels in it. He makes sure to feel every second of it, every kick, every shock the blows send through his body, but then suddenly it stops. He groans in disappointment.

There's the sound of shouting and the rustle of a struggle. John rolls over onto his back and just flops there in the mud. There's so much blood pouring from his wounds that it bleeds into his eyes, and he can

barely make out four figures wrestling with one another. He can, however, despite his pounding ears hear the approaching march of the Krauts who must've just now somehow noticed the commotion.

The four other men become aware of it, too, and the fighting stops almost immediately upon the click of the guns that he can only assume are now very likely trained on all of them. One of the men cautiously moves to stand directly in front of him.

"You ever fuckin' touch him again and I'll fucking blind you."

The words are spoken quietly but harshly at the two POWs through what he can tell are gritted teeth. John's head is spinning but he knows that gruff, angelic voice. He knows that voice better than the back of his hand. He's never, ever heard it in such a dangerous, low, and threatening tone before.

"We're goin'," his angel barks, most likely at the Krauts this time. He's roughly gripped by the shoulders and yanked up to his feet. He wobbles and is nearly falling back into the dirt immediately. The grip on him tightens and a strong arm wraps around his waist, pulling him close to steady him. "John."

His eyes are still closed wearily but he smiles. He can taste the blood in his teeth and flooding his mouth. It invigorates him. "Hey, baby, you come here often?"

Gale doesn't laugh. He throws one of John's limp arms over his shoulders, starting to lead them to what John assumes is their bunks. "This isn't funny," he snaps.

John is still smiling. He lets his head fall against the shorter man's shoulder. "I didn't say it was, doll face."

He's being held so close that he can feel Gale's jaw tighten in annoyance. Gale struggles to get him over the steps to the safety of inside and John starts to actually feel bad. He tries to pull away to carry some of his weight himself, but Gale jerks him back to his side with enough force it makes him wince at the pain it shoots through his ribs.

Once they're over the doorstep he feels the multiple hands of their bunk mates pulling at him and helping Gale. He's laid gently onto a bed and he hears somebody swear as he starts to drift in and out of consciousness.

"Fuck, Buck, the fuck happened to him?"

"Just help me get his clothes off. I don't know where he's bleedin' from."

John was starting to feel cold. He wondered if this was it. But that was what he wanted, right?

"You stupid, stupid man. *Fuck."*

Buck was the poster boy of a good, honorable soldier. He almost never drank, he never messed around on Marge, he almost never lost his composure. Bucky can count on just two hands the amount of times he'd heard him swear, and over half of them had been in the just the last few days as John really had started spiraling out of control. He heard Buck inhale sharply upon removing his shirt fully, and they both now knew that Bucky's injuries were much worse than either had thought. This really could be it.

No, he thought. Not yet. Not like this. He had to say it first. He had to

tell him. He couldn't go without telling him. He was more scared of that than he was of death.

"Buck."

There was no reply. He could feel hands desperately pressing cloths against his broken body in an attempt to stop the life from leaking out of him.

"Buck."

"*What*, John?"

He took every bit of strength he had left to reach up and take his best friend's frantic hands into his own. They weren't alone, they were surrounded by other men who were also rushing around him in an attempt to save his life, but it felt like it was now or never.

"I love you."

Once the three words left his mouth, what he thought might be his last breaths followed. It was so dark. He wished he could clearly see Buck's beautiful face one last time instead of the blurred figure he'd become. Or maybe it was better off that he couldn't, because Buck didn't say those forbidden words he'd held inside for so long back. It stung but he wasn't surprised; he couldn't be. Even if by some chance Gale did want to say it back, he would have had to live with the consequences. John, well, it was looking like he wouldn't have to.

"Then don't you fuckin' leave me here."

There was a desperation and brokenness in Gale's tone that John had never heard before. He figured it was as close to an *I love you too* as he would ever get.

His hands loosened from Gale's and fell to his sides as he felt his head loll back into the pillow.

"No, no, *no*."

Gale's pleading is the last thing John is able to make out and it puts a faint smile on his face. Gale *did* love him too. It didn't matter right now in what way, he just was happy to feel in what might be his last moments that Gale loved him too. It was almost enough and he'd accepted a long time ago that "almost enough" was all he'd ever get of Gale Cleven.

John breathes in, and then it all turns black.

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Chapter Two Summary/Peek:

He sees Gale swallow nervously at the suggestiveness in his voice but he remains unwavering. There's a challenge in John's eyes as he stares the younger man down. He wants to push Gale to ask more; he's daring him to.

Chapter 2: look at this godforsaken mess that you made me

Chapter Summary

> He sees Gale swallow nervously at the suggestiveness in his voice but he remains unwavering. There's a challenge in John's eyes as he stares the younger man down. He wants to push Gale to ask more; he's daring him to.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

song i listened to while writing: illicit affairs by taylor swift

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He comes back to life violently; reluctantly ripped away from the sweet release he'd been chasing since they'd arrived here.

He hadn't planned on putting up much of a fight when the time came to meet his maker. But something, or someone, had gripped him tight, spit in the face of the void on his behalf, and told death that they couldn't have him.

So he wakes with a gasp. There was something weighing on his left arm keeping him down. He tries to pull away from it, to sit up, but whatever it is keeps him from doing so. He quickly realizes that it's a blessing he can't get up, because just the few movements he'd made within not even a minute of being conscious had sent writhing pain shooting up and down his entire body.

"Yeah, I wouldn't do that if I were you, Major."

John blinks, but his vision is still spotty and he can't make out who's speaking to him. "W-who," he tries, but his voice comes out chopped and hoarse. His throat is dry as sandpaper. He must've been out for at least a few days now.

"It's Hambone. Can you see?"

John blinks again, but the black dots don't go away. "N-not very well right now, no."

Hambone hums in response. "Well, if you were wondering, you look like shit."

John lets out a choked laugh. He didn't think he'd ever hear that asshole's voice again. "I feel like shit."

He hears Hambone shuffle across the room and a cup clinking as he approaches his bedside. It's pressed into his hand with a gentleness John didn't think Hambone had in him. He thanks the man and eagerly tries to bring it to his lips with a shaky right hand. Hambone has to help him.

"Try not to wake him up just yet, would ya? This is the most sleep I've seen him get since you been out."

John suddenly is reminded of the heaviness anchoring him down by his arm. He turns, the few sips of water having brought some life back into him, and Gale Cleven's mop of blond hair is the first thing he can somewhat see.

Buck's head is resting on his arm and John's eyes drink the sight of the

unconscious man in with even more urgency than he'd attempted to chug the water Hambone had given him. His hair was matted and dirtier than usual even for this place, his under eyes as purple as could be, but John could have and would have sworn on anything and everything that he'd never seen anything so radiant and divine as Gale Cleven in that moment.

An angel, his thoughts echoed.

Gale, even in his deep slumber, had his fingertips resting gingerly on John's wrist. The thought that Gale must've been so worried that a pulse might not be there that his hand was unmoving makes Buck's heart flutter and ache with guilt and something else. He thickly swallows back those feelings, forcing himself to turn away and look up at the ceiling.

"I thought I was dead," he says. *I wanted to be dead,* he thinks.

"So did we," Hambone replies quieter than before. "We patched you up the best we could, but one of your wounds got infected pretty fast. The Krauts wouldn't give us nothin' to treat it, not even- not even when Buck begged."

He couldn't picture Gale Cleven begging those damn Krauts for anything.

"How long have I been out?"

"About a week."

John drags a bruised and bandaged hand down his face. "Well fuck."

There's a pause before Hambone speaks again. "Buck… he didn't leave your side the whole time, besides once or twice to try to get help. We tried to get him to rest, to eat more than he was, but he insisted on being the one to watch over you. I don't think he trusted anyone else to do it."

John tries not to let himself think about what the man is saying too hard. He had spent a lot of time misplaced in the self-created idea that Gale might have the special kind of worry that John had for him, too. He didn't want to forget that it was just something he'd made up.

"Gale Cleven can be a stubborn bastard," he replies, both because he doesn't really know what else to say in response to the information, and also because it's true.

Once his friend had made a decision on something, it was almost impossible to change his mind. Some would say this was a character flaw, but to his credit, Gale Cleven was very rarely ever wrong. It's why so many men so willingly and blindly followed him without question. It was infuriating sometimes. There was a reason John had thrown *King of the Camp* at him as an insult over what now would've been a week go.

The thought of their fight brings back that pang of guilt and that *something else* he's always avoiding.

Hambone says nothing, and Bucky can't bring himself to look him in the eye. He's afraid of what he might see there if he does. After a few seconds of silence he hears the uncrossing of two arms and the man starting to make his way to the exit.

"I'm gonna go let the other boys know your sorry ass is awake,"

Hambone calls over his shoulder and the door falls shut with a solid *thunk* behind him.

Gale still does not stir.

John studies the younger man again, the part of his lips, the length of his eyelashes. He can't remember the last time he'd been able to just look at Gale for this long. It hurt.

Gale doesn't wake up in time before John eventually succumbs to the darkness once again.

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There's a feather, or something, dancing around John's eyes and caressing down his cheek. His nose scrunches and his eyes flutter open at the gentle touch just in time to see Buck snatch his hand away like he'd been burned.

The signature cocky smile John Egan almost always sported started to creep back onto his face, and he spoke with more flourish than a man who had just woken up from a week coma and was in as much pain as he was should be able to.

"Did ya miss me?"

"You're awake," Gale says, short and in a gruff tone. He doesn't smile back. He's still sat in the same spot he was before, except much more

alert this time.

Bucky searches his friends eyes for something further, he'd almost died after all, but his friends face seems purposely closed off.

"I'm awake," he echoes. "How long was I out this time?"

Buck's stoic composure falters.

"Just a few hours."

"Well, that's good."

John jumps when Gale lets out an unexpected and incredulous laugh at his words.

"Good?" He asks, with a half-wild look now in his eyes as he berates John. "Good would've been you not goin' and gettin' almost dead!"

Silence follows the outburst. How uncharacteristic it is of the younger soldier to showcase such emotion has them both staring at one another with a loss for words.

Gale is the first one to look away.

"I'm sorry," John whispers eventually, because he is. Not for the almost dying part, but for what he had made his friend endure the past few weeks as his mental state had started to crumble.

Gale doesn't look up at him after the apology but he sees a small nod of acknowledgment. John, mind reeling and still cloudy, thinks to the last moments they'd shared before he had passed out.

"About-about what l said-"

Gale quickly cuts him off before he can say anything else.

"It's fine," he insists, "You were dying. You were scared."

John is left open-mouthed, taken aback by the swift dismissal, and Gale is looking directly at him now. There's an almost indiscernible sadness in his eyes that is quickly covered up by an assertiveness. "You were dying," he repeats with his hardened gaze, and this time it sounds like a warning. "You were scared."

It had been light outside the windows the first time he came to, but it was almost dark now. The only light in the room came from the dim lanterns and it made the silhouette of Gale look haunting.

"Yeah," John agrees hollowly after a long period of silence. He eventually turns onto his back, away from where Gale is seated.

He hears Gale clear his throat. "Your friend, uh, he came by a few times while you were out."

"Hambone?" He questions flatly, adjusting the pillow behind his head with more roughness and force than was necessary. "Yeah. We talked."

“No, uh- your friend from the other night. Fella’ said his name was, um, James Wilson, I believe.”

John stills in his aggressive movements. He was talking about not-Gale. “Huh,” he says. “So that’s his name.”

When he looks over to his friend again, Gale’s face is scrunched in confusion. He shifts uncomfortably in his chair. “You- you didn’t know his name?”

John flashes back to how the two most definitely would have looked like they were close enough to know each other’s names. He can tell by the uneasiness of Gale that he’s thinking about that closeness, too.

He realizes that he had never seen Gale, or *King Cleven*, ever look so awkward before. He feels empowered by it. He feels bold. He wants to retaliate for how Gale tossed what could’ve been his last words aside like they were nothing, when they had in fact been everything.

“Should I have known his name?” John says, making sure to sound coy. He sees Gale swallow nervously at the suggestiveness in his voice but he remains unwavering. There’s a challenge in John’s eyes as he stares the younger man down. He wants to push Gale to ask more questions about what he’d been doing that night; he’s daring him to.

The door swings open and suddenly the room is swarmed by the other men.

“Bucky, you son of a bitch!”

Brady and Crank are by his side within seconds, all smiles and cheerfulness. He can't fully see Gale's expression anymore while he shakes his boys hands and returns their enthusiastic greetings, but he knows that Gale hasn't gotten up or moved at the interruption.

The happy reunion is cut short, however, when a soldier from another barrack bursts into the room with urgency that could only ever mean bad news.

"Goons gave us 30 minutes to be at the front gate," he informs them. "23000 hours, then we march. They won't say for how far or for how long."

There's a collective gasp throughout the room and shocked objections. The men parted like the sea around Buck and Bucky. They looked between the two men with fear. John knows they're waiting for their king to say something, anything- but Gale just runs his hands through his hair, pulls at it, and curses.

Everybody knew there was no way in hell John Egan was in any shape to make it through a night march in this icebox.

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Chapter Three Summary/Peek:

Bucky drops to the ground so hard that Gale collapses with him.

"*We have to go," they tell Gale, pulling at him, trying to rip him away from Bucky's crumpled form. "You have to leave him."*

Chapter End Notes

i have this mostly drafted/fleshed out completely so i'll be updating hopefully every other day possibly every day based on demand < 3

also do we want the next chapter from Buck's point of view or keep going with just Bucky's? let me know in the comments!

Chapter 3: i'll pick up these broken pieces till' i'm bleedin'

Chapter Summary

> Bucky falls to the ground so hard that Gale collapses with him.
>
> "We have to go," they tell Gale, pulling at him, trying to rip him away from Bucky's crumpled form. "You have to leave him."

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

song chapter is named after/that i listened to while writing: it will rain by bruno mars

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Gale had heard John say a lot of odd, half-lucid and surely fever-induced things while he was in and out of consciousness.

Most of them had been, or had at least included, Gale's name.

The first time it happens Gale's face turns a shade of red his men had never seen before. John moaned it again as he writhed in the bed, and while he knew obviously it was out of pain and not pleasure, he couldn't help how flushed it made him. He pointedly didn't look at any of the boys out of embarrassment, just dipping the cloth in his hand into the half-melted bucket of snow at his feet and routinely bringing it up to Bucky's hairline that dripped with sweat.

"Go get me some fresh powder, would ya boys?" He'd ordered hesitantly, trying to sound as not-awkward as possible even though the snow he'd already had was clearly still mostly frozen and usable.

Regardless, none of his men had questioned him and the room emptied quickly upon his request.

It finally gives him a moment alone with his best friend. His best friend who had, barely under 48 hours ago, told him that he loved him.

Gale didn't know what to do with that.

He dipped the cloth into the bucket and rang it out again, stopping just short of Bucky's forehead with it this time. He took this moment, the other men now gone, to actually look at the slightly older man's face.

Gale Cleven had always known that John Egan was one hell of a looker. It was obvious in the way women reacted to his presence and charm. John Egan factually was, for a lack of a better word to describe such a striking man, *beautiful*. Even now, knocked out and battered, the brown haired boy was beautiful.

However he'd never taken the time to really think about it before, or maybe he'd never let himself. Why would he? Gale is a man, and John is a man, and he- well, he has Marge. And Gale loves Marge. He knew that.

And now he knew that John loved him, because upon thinking he was dying, John had confessed that he loved Gale.

But not in the same way as Gale loved Marge, obviously. Gale was a man and Marge was a woman.

A man *couldn't* love a man like a man loved a woman.

Gale gently pressed the tip of the cold rag to Bucky's temple. He had the sudden urge to replace it with his lips, like he'd done many times to comfort Marge.

Or could he?

No, that's wrong, Gale thought almost in horror to himself. A man can't love a man that way. John Egan was sick- John Egan was mentally unwell. Everybody knew John was mentally unwell right now. This place had gotten to him and it had corrupted him. It had made him start to think things a man would not normally think.

But once they left, once they got out, it would all be okay again. John would be normal again. He'd be healthy and happy again. Gale believed that.

Gale had no choice but to believe that.

However, by the end of day four of John being unconscious and the infection not getting better, his belief that both of them will even make it out together in the first place begins to waver.

It became a very real possibility that John Egan wasn't going to make it out of this godforsaken camp alive.

The possibility kept Gale awake at night. It made him feel a worry and dread he'd never felt before; a worry and dread that made it so he couldn't eat without having to fight to not throw it up. And they didn't have enough food to waste like that, so he just… had sort of,

without really even noticing, stopped eating at some point.

John Egan didn't deserve to die here. John was a troubled man, and undeniably a very broken one, but goddamnit if he wasn't a good one.

Gale had never questioned that fact. Ever since he'd met John, he'd known that as a fact. By now he had proudly defended that very fact many, many times over to more people than he could count.

But it was starting to look like all of that didn't matter in the grand scheme of things, because John might die here in this desolate and soulless place, and the history books would forget about him completely.

Gale would never forget, though.

Bucky was an extension of him at this point. He'd given him his name, after all, and Buck had taken it almost without question. *They were made for each other,* Marge had said teasingly to him many times before.

In the most platonic way possible, of course.

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Gale wakes up on day six, after having only left his side when he absolutely had to, to John still seemingly out cold. His eyes, for the

first time since he'd arrived here, started to water.

He can't imagine how hard things would have been without John there by his side these past few years. He almost didn't know if he'd been able to do it without him.

And now, he was afraid he might have to figure it out.

"He woke up earlier," Hambone says from behind him. Gale startles. He hadn't realize somebody else was in the room. "He was actually makin' some sense."

Gale, upon hearing this, does then actually begin to cry. Just a few tears escape his eyes as relief floods his chest. He laughs shakily and is quick to wipe them away before they can be noticed.

He puts his palm to John's forehead and feels that it's not nearly as hot or clammy as it had been those past few long and agonizing days.

"Well, I'll be."

He can breathe again for what feels like the first time in ages.

He leaves his hand there longer than he should.

-

“Did ya miss me?”

Gale wants to smack that smirk off of John Egan’s face.

He can’t stop himself when he laughs in disbelief at his friend’s carelessness. He snaps at him for his lack of self-perseveration, for his foolishness; but mostly, he lashes out at him for the fact that John Egan had been about to leave him here.

And then before Gale is able to speak again, John goes and has to try to bring up those three damn words.

Gale doesn’t let him finish the sentence. In fact, he barely even lets him start it. He wouldn’t indulge in this looney behavior John had fallen into. He couldn’t. Someone had to be the one to be realistic and nip this in the bud, and Gale knew it wasn’t going to be John.

“*You were dying,”* Gale tells John firmly with eyes and a tone of voice that tries to leave no room for question, because any other reasoning or explanation would be a sin. “*You were scared.”*

He doesn’t know if he repeats the words again for John’s sake in an effort to convince him, or for his own to convince himself.

”*You were dying. You were scared.”*

The hurt that flashes across John’s face and the way he turns away from Gale makes him feel a sickening sense of regret bloom in his

chest.

He pushes it down and clears his throat. He needs to change the subject.

However his choice of subject is, admittedly, very poorly thought out. But the interactions had loomed in the back of his mind ever since they'd taken place, and the story comes out without much forethought.

He recounts to John how James, the man he'd saw him with past lights out that one night, had visited a handful of times. Him and Gale would exchange a few curt and brief words, James would stare at Bucky for no longer than a minute or two, and they would say nothing to one another when he would leave.

But then John tells him that he didn't even know the man's name, and Gale's mind twists itself in knots as John's eyes start to twinkle with that all too familiar mischief.

"Should I have remembered his name?" He'd asked him teasingly, the man's smile all teeth. Gale wasn't dull. He knew what John was insinuating; they'd spoken many times about his many late night encounters with different women whose names he couldn't always recount. But those had been women.

You're being mean, Gale had wanted to say, *you aren't being fair*.

But their boys flooded in before he had to muster a reply at all, thank God. But then he wasn't thanking God, or thankful at all, because they were about to have to march for miles and hours at a time in the freezing cold.

And Bucky had barely broken his fever, not to mention that they didn't even know if he could stand.

-

Bucky can't keep up.

Even with Gale holding him up by his shoulder with all the strength he could spare and his repeated words of encouragement, John Egan was undeniably slowing down.

"John, please, you know I can't carry you very far like this."

It's not that Gale was weak, but John was just bigger than him. Not much by weight, maybe, but just certainly taller and more awkward and difficult for Gale to drag along or take down.

This had always been funny to John. He'd call Gale *my little this, my little that*. The most recent quip had been when Gale informed Bucky he thought he could build them a new radio, and the man had cooed back to him *my little guglielmo marconi, huh?*

Gale would always roll his eyes and brush the borderline flirtatious comments off, telling himself that was just John, but he'd secretly always found it endearing.

It wasn't funny or endearing now.

Fear started to twist in his heart and he could feel his lungs constrict. John was starting to become a dead weight. Buck was now falling behind, too.

And then to his horror, Bucky drops to the ground so hard that Gale collapses with him.

"John!" He'd yelled, immediately scrambling to untangle himself from his fallen friend and shake him. "John, *get up*. You gotta' get up."

Bucky doesn't respond. His eyes are rolled into the back of his head and he's become unresponsive entirely. Gale shakes him harder, the pleas pouring from his mouth becoming more and more desperate.

He feels the cold press of a gun to the side of his head.

"*Buck, we have to go*," someone's telling him, pulling at him, trying to rip him away from Bucky's crumpled form. "*You have to leave him.*"

The urgent voices of his friends are muffled and he vaguely hears the German soldiers shouting at him, but they all sound far away. It's like he's underwater. He's drowning. Gale feels like there suddenly isn't enough oxygen in the world.

Brady and Crank both have a hand on him now, urging him forward and away from death, but all he can think about is how Bucky never got any letters like the rest of the men did.

He thinks about how there was no one there when Bucky had been losing his mind, just agitated men who wanted him out of the way, and how he'd barely been there for the poor man himself. He feels a wave of shame for this, but being around Bucky with the way he'd been acting back at camp had felt like playing with fire. Gale hadn't wanted to get burned. He'd tell himself that one of them, after all, needed to stay unscathed for the sake of their boys and that John Egan eventually would be, like he always was, fine.

He had been so incredibly, terribly wrong.

So he makes a different choice this time.

"I ain't quittin' on him," Gale says, anguishedly but sternly, as he gathers Bucky's limp form into his arms. He looks up at Brady and Crank with eyes that plead with them to understand. He couldn't leave his best friend here to be put down like a bad dog- he wouldn't.

"Then you'll die with him," one of the German soldiers spits in broken English.

He closes his eyes, just for a second, and hopes that Marge forgives him for not making it back to her like he'd promised he would.

When he opens them again, Gale has zero plans on begging these assholes- it hadn't worked the first time he'd swallowed his pride and done it in hopes they'd give them something to treat John's infection, and it wasn't about to work now.

But, even so, Gale is afraid. He can't pretend he isn't afraid, because he had never planned on his plane being shot down, and he'd most certainly never planned on dying.

How would he be able to continue on though, carrying the knowledge that he'd left the man who loved him, the man who had been by his side unwaveringly this whole time, behind to die alone? Even if he did, a piece of him would perish here with John. Maybe even the most important piece.

There is a steady and resolved glint in his eyes when he turns slightly to look directly down the barrel of the German soldier's gun. "If I must," he drawls in his low-pitched voice.

He hears the outcry of his boys, watches the Kraut's jaw tick, and then he tunes it all out to look down at his best friend's bruise and scar-littered face. At least, he thinks solemnly to himself, the last thing he sees will be beautiful.

Gale, now that it doesn't matter who is watching anymore, allows himself to bring a trembling palm up to Bucky's cold cheeks. There were snowflakes starting to gather on Bucky's eyelashes that had always been uncharacteristically long for a man. He lets their foreheads fall together and pulls his frail body closer to him like if he holds him tight enough, the rest of the world might fade away.

He wants to say it back, those three forbidden words, they're at the tip of his tongue and could fall out so easily and earnestly, if only he wasn't so afraid that God would hear him. All that comes out is a tender repeat of the words John had told him all those months ago in that cafeteria with that wide, gorgeous grin on his face.

"*It's me and you.*"

If John somehow hears him, he doesn't show it.

Here, crumpled together in the middle of this dirt road, was as close

as they'd ever been. It's as close as Gale had ever let them be.

Even upon reuniting after months of not seeing each other, not knowing if the other was alive, Gale had only allowed himself to shake Bucky's hand. Bucky was touchy, something he'd eventually began to be okay with and see it as normal, even joke about with Curt, but he had to draw the line somewhere to protect both of their manhood.

He regrets all of that now. He wished he could take back all the times he'd stopped John from pulling him close.

"*I'm sorry.*"

He hears the guard cock their gun and he silently prays that he goes first. He doesn't want to see them put a bullet through Bucky's head.

But the gun never goes off.

He raises his head to see a wall of his fellow POWs standing between him and the Germans.

Gale can see them connecting the dots at the same time as he does; realizing that if they executed him and John, there would be a riot. The two were the leaders of the group. There undeniably would be chaos, and the enemy troops were closing in too quickly for them to afford a disruption like that.

They lower their guns. "You keep up," the same guard from before says begrudgingly, German accent heavy with hatred, "or we put a bullet in both of your heads."

Gale feels someone touch his shoulder from behind.

It's James Wilson.

He has a tarp he must have been using to shield himself from the wind and snow, and he's offering it to Gale.

He accepts it and together the two men place John in the tarp and fasten it in a way where they can drag him. James Wilson keeps his hands on John's body a little too long.

Gale has to fight the urge to smack the man's hands away.

They take turns the rest of the march dragging Bucky's almost lifeless body behind them.

-

Chapter Four Summary/Peek:

The limited space has them chest to chest and Bucky can feel every breath Gale is taking. Well, he could if Buck had been taking in any breaths. It felt like the younger man had stopped breathing entirely at their proximity.

"You okay, bud?" John asks tentatively. His friend's silence has him nervous.

“Just peachy,” Gale snaps.

It’s then when Gale finally looks at him that he realizes they’re almost nose to nose and their mouths are mere inches away from each others. Bucky wonders what would happen if he closed that gap and slotted them together. If it weren’t for their height difference, all he’d have to do is sway forward slightly.

Chapter End Notes

highly requested chapter from Gale’s pov and two updates in just 24 hours bc of all ur lovely comments <3 keep them coming! i love to see what parts you enjoy/what you want to see.

edit: had to go back and fix that i put ——- instead of a line bc i forgot what it was lol! didn’t remember to fix it before I posted it whoops

Chapter 4: if i breathe you will it kill me?

Chapter Summary

> The limited space has them chest to chest and Bucky can feel every breath Gale is taking. Well, he could if Buck had been taking in any breaths. It felt like the younger man had stopped breathing entirely at their proximity.
>
> “You okay, bud?” John asks tentatively. His friend’s silence has him nervous.
>
> “Just peachy,” Gale snaps.
>
> It’s then when Gale finally looks at him that he realizes they’re almost nose to nose and their mouths are mere inches away from each others. Bucky wonders what would happen if he closed that gap and slotted them together. If it weren’t for their height difference, all he’d have to do is sway forward slightly.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

song i listened to while writing/that the chapter is named after: georgia by phoebe bridges

-

When John gains consciousness a few hours into the arrival of their first rest stop, Gale tells him that he’d changed his mind.

They were leaving- if John could stand up even slightly on his own two feet, they would be leaving tonight.

“You won’t make it through anotha’ night march,” he explains to him. “Not at the pace and distance they been makin’ us go.”

John opens his mouth, head swarming with a million questions, but Gale powers on before he can do so. “We got shot at by our own damn planes after you went down. We’d just be better off on our own. If we keep it tight- me, you, and James- we can make it.”

James?

His eyes flicker to the right of John, and there sits not-Gale. He blinks a few times at the unexpected sight. The two now both in front of him, he realizes that not-Gale actually doesn’t look like real-Gale at all. Really, the only things they had in common were basic traits: being blond, blue-eyed, and shorter than John himself.

The truth was that not-Gale drastically paled in comparison to the real thing. Not that not-Gale wasn’t more than easy on the eyes, of course; Bucky had standards, after all. It was just almost laughable that John had thought they looked alike in the first place.

John, without meaning to, does let out a slight chuckle. “Nice to see you again, gorgeous.”

Not-Gale’s cheeks turn pink at the compliment, and… so do real-Gale’s.

But instead of smiling like the latter, his Gale grunts in annoyance. “So can ya stand,” he asks ruggedly, “or not?”

Bucky studies his friend silently and Gale holds the eye contact with a determination he knew well. Gale wouldn’t even think about leaving if he didn’t have genuine reason to believe they had better odds of making it out alive that way.

“I can stand.”

-

There’s confusion in the masses later that night, and the three men all agree to take advantage of it. Bucky makes a point of Gale going before him so he can keep watch over the younger man, and then when he makes it mostly to the fence, not-Gale tells him to follow and that he’ll be right behind him. Bucky doesn’t argue. He rushes after Buck.

“Hey, hey, don’t shoot!”

There’s the sound of a gun going off behind him, and he turns to see not-Gale wrestling with a German soldier. John knows he can’t save him without likely dying himself. James Wilson knows that, too. As he’s pushed to the ground, he calls out for John to run.

He hesitates, because of course he does- there’s an innocent man’s life on the line.

“Bucky!”

The sound of Gale’s voice snaps him out of the war in his head, as it always has, and he goes tumbling over the wall.

-

They continue running for a long time after they hear that last gunshot ring out. They run until John can't anymore.

The frozen dirt feels as hard as concrete when his legs finally give out and he falls to his knees. Gale is by his side in an instant to gently push him back down when he tries to get back up.

"It's okay," he assures him, nodding to the coverage of the surrounding forest they'd made it to. "We can rest here."

Unbeknownst to them it turns out to not, in fact, be okay.

-

John wakes up to a child in front of him.

A child with a gun.

Gale, he immediately thinks with fear. He scans the surrounding area quickly in a panic but doesn't see any sign of his friend. He didn't know whether to be relieved or worried.

There's no time to decide between the two, because the small German starts to shout *Amerikaner* and John can do nothing but sit and watch. He's unarmed, he's injured, and he's alone. His doom really was about to come from an innocent boy who was likely forced to fight in the first place and didn't know any better.

But then something smashes into the kid so hard and quick that he's knocked nearly ten feet back.

John's heart skips an entire beat.

Gale Cleven was towering over the young soldier. In the tackle he must've claimed the gun, because it's now trained right on the barely pubescent boy.

The two had rolled in a way that Gale had landed in front of all of them, and this gives John a full view of the terrifying look on his friends face even from where he's still sat on the ground. Gale's eyes are that of a wild animals- stricken with a fear and rage so raw and unhinged it makes John's stomach flip. John can see the hand holding the gun trembling and for a minute, he thinks Gale is actually about to execute a child.

"Git!" Gale booms, his voice ringing with an intensity John had never even heard from him as a Major in the Air Force. He doesn't need to say anymore for the German boy to scramble to his feet and start to flee.

As soon as the enemy soldier is unquestionably out of sight and not a threat, Gale turns to him with those still wild eyes.

“Gale-“ John starts to say worriedly.

Quicker than he thinks he’d ever seen the man move, Gale rushes over. Not a second goes by before he’s running his hands all over John’s body- he grabs at his face, at his clothes.

“*Did he hurt you?”* Gale demands to know in that low-pitch of his. Something about it makes John feel flushed. He shakes his head, left speechless by Gale’s touches and primal demeanor.

Gale’s shoulders slump and eyes close like John’s assurance of safety had zapped all the anger right out of him. “You need to stop almost dyin’ on me every two seconds,” Gale lectures in a weak attempt at a joke to de-escalate what had just happened. His hands are still gripping John tightly by both arms.

For a second he thinks Gale might, for the first time, hug him. His heart is in his throat at the thought of it.

Gale gives him a light squeeze where he has him by with both hands, and then he lets go.

Where he’d touched John tingles for hours after.

-

The second time they run into enemy soldiers, John and Gale spot them first.

“I have a really bad idea,” John tells him from the tall grass they were crouched behind.

“All of your ideas are really bad ideas,” Gale shoots back with a fondness to the quip.

Even with his adrenaline pumping so hard, a smile pulls at his lips. “Yeah, well, this might be one of the worst.”

Gale looks at him expectantly.

“I think we can fit into that tree trunk over there.”

The look on Gale’s face is so incredulous it makes him almost want to laugh.

“Well do you have any better ideas, sweetheart?” He asks with raised eyebrows as they listen to the tanks just a few feet away amble even closer down the road.

Gale doesn’t.

They get into the tree trunk.

-

“Told you,” John whispers mockingly. Because they *do* fit. Barely, but they fit.

Gale doesn’t respond. He’s staring intently upwards and not at John.

The limited space has them chest to chest and Bucky can feel every breath Gale is taking. Well, he could if Buck had been taking in any breaths. It felt like the younger man had stopped breathing entirely at their proximity.

“You okay, bud?” John asks tentatively. His friend’s silence has him nervous.

“Just peachy,” Gale snaps.

It’s then when Gale finally looks at him that he realizes they’re almost nose to nose and their mouths are mere inches away from each others. Bucky wonders what would happen if he closed that gap and slotted them together. If it weren’t for their height difference, all he’d have to do is sway forward slightly.

Gale would deck him as soon as they stepped out of here is what would happen, he thinks to himself sourly.

Gale’s face contorts like he can read his mind. “*Don’t*, John,” he warns,

and it sounds like he's in pain.

It's John that doesn't respond this time. He can't look away from Gale's mouth. He feels hypnotized and can't help the way he licks his own lips subconsciously. He sees, and feels, Gale's breath hitch at this.

A gunshot breaks the silence and makes both of them jump forward. The quick rub of friction of Gale's body against his and the way the corner of their mouths brush ever so slightly goes straight to his cock.

"Buck-"

"*Stop fuckin' talking.*"

All John can do is nod his head and bite his bottom lip. Gale is back to pointedly doing everything he can in such a small space to not look at him. After a few minutes go by without commotion from outside, John can't take it anymore and tells Gale that he's going to peek to see if the coast is clear.

"Wait-" Gale says with an unexpected airiness to his voice as John goes to lean out of the opening of the trunk. His hands fly up to grab John's hips and keep him in place, but he's too late.

"*Oh,"* John murmurs. The movement had brought them impossibly closer again like before, and it became very, very apparent to both men that Gale Cleven was hard.

Gale Cleven was *really* hard.

“*Fuck,”* Gale hissed through clenched teeth. John’s mind started going a million miles a minute, because he knew there wasn’t a way out of this. Gale couldn’t talk it away like he’d had done with John’s confession. John didn’t even have the option to let him. It was a terrifying realization for both parties.

Gale hands were still frozen where he’d placed them on Bucky’s hips. Neither man had moved a muscle out of fear, even as John’s own hardness had begun to grow and rub against Gale’s.

“*Gale,”* he breathed. Every part of him felt like it had electricity running through it. He hadn’t felt this alive in a long, long time.

“*John,”* Gale replied in the same breathless tone. He was looking at John with rare unguarded eyes. His pupils were blown wide with what was undeniably want and those pouty, perfectly pink lips of his were parted ever so slightly open.

John senselessly leans forward to press their mouths together in the way he’d wanted to for years, but Gale tightens his hold on his hips and stops him. John almost whines in disappointment.

“We can’t,” Gale tells him in an absolutely wrecked voice. John’s heart sinks deeper than it ever has before. “*I can’t.”*

And then Gale pushes himself out of the enclosed space of their tree without checking if anyone was outside that might try to shoot them first.

-

Chapter Five Summary/Peek:

Curt, Crosby and Rosie are the first ones to greet them when they land.

The New Yorker rushes ahead of the group, grinning from ear to ear. “I ain’t ever think I’d be so happy to see that ugly mug of yuh’s!” He exclaims and throws his arms around Bucky.

John laughs the first genuine, full laugh he has in days. He picks up Curt and spins him around.

Chapter End Notes

I edited the previous chapter a TON after posting it so depending how much you care, I definitely recommend going back bc it’s much better. Promise that won’t be a regular thing, just shouldn’t have wrote it and posted it on no sleep without rereading lol. But same exact things ensue so not a requirement ;) but that’s also why I didn’t reply to a lot of the comments bc I wasn’t super happy with the writing at first so I apologize, I usually always respond!

I also owe an apology to the people who mentioned liking the James Wilson plot point bc I murked the poor guy. or did I?

And yes if you haven’t read the tags and the sneak peek of the next chapter I rewrote history and Curt DID NOT DIE. That absolutely wrecked me, I loved the dynamic he had with John and Gale. So nope. Didn’t happen. We don’t talk about it.

Leave me your thoughts and opinions below! <3 makes my day to read them x

Chapter 5: only love can hurt like this

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

song i listened to while writing/chapter is name after: only love can hurt like this by paloma faith

-

By some miracle, on their second night of escaping they run into American soldiers at the first town they come across.

They throw their hands in the air and Gale, ever the honorable man, purposely puts himself between John and their guns.

Instead of feeling thankful for his friend, it puts a bitter taste is John's mouth.

They don't shoot and John and Gale are on a plane heading back to the 100th before morning comes.

-

Curt, Crosby and Rosie are the first ones to greet them when they land.

The New Yorker rushes ahead of the group, grinning from ear to ear. “I ain’t ever think I’d be so happy to see that ugly mug of yuh’s!” He exclaims and throws his arms around Bucky.

John laughs the first genuine laugh he has in days. He picks up Curt and spins him around.

“John *Eeeegan*!” Crosby says with a silly amount of emphasis on the beginning of his last name. He has an arm extended out as soon as both of Curt’s feet have been planted back on the ground. Him and John shake enthusiastically with both hands clasped together.

Out of the corner of his eye, he sees Gale shaking hands with Rosie and give him a pat on the shoulder. His smile isn’t as big as everyone else’s, but the happiness and relief is still evident on his face.

While Curt and Crosby run over to excitedly greet their other superior officer, John finally lets out the air he feels like had been trapped in his lungs forever.

He hears Gale chuckle. *“Crosby, Curt, they still got you in this dump?”*

On the contrary, he knew both of them had never been so relieved to see the camp of the 100th.

-

He isn't alone much with Gale before the war ends. He suspects this isn't an accidental accurance.

But when they hear that announcement that the ceasefire had already begun and it would all officially be over tomorrow, he throws an arm over Gale's shoulder while he hollers in joy and Gale doesn't stop him. The two cheer along with everybody around them and sway together.

During the celebration that night, he and Gale sneak away from the commotion. Both having been through so much these past few weeks wanted some fresh air to digest the shocking, wonderful news.

Flares boom in the sky while they sit alone in the radio tower above everybody soaking it all in. When Bucky passes Gale his flask, he's surprised when Gale actually takes a swig.

The younger man passes it back to him and it's the first time he fully, really looks into Bucky's eyes since they'd been back. The fire in the sky reflects and dances in those blue eyes Bucky adored so much. He thinks that Buck had never looked so breathtaking. Those three words bubble in his throat again and he wants to tell him both of these things, but he doesn't want to scare Gale out of this intimate moment.

The two hold each other's gaze for much, much longer than two people who were just friends would.

-

John and Gale end up flying off the base together. Not really by choice, but just because everyone had assumed without asking that the two best of friends would want to. John doesn't complain about this. After all, it combined his two favorite things: flying, and Gale.

He caves, and asks him about Marge, his *fiancé*, the elephant that had been in the room ever since Gale had told him he popped the question. They hadn't spoken of her since. He tries his best to keep a teasing note to his voice, and not let the sadness he feels creep into it.

"*You ready to see Marge?"*

Gale throws him a grateful, tight-lipped smile and hums low in reply.

John swallows back the lump in his throat and turns to look out the window. "I bet."

As he takes one last look at the camp he'd called home for so many months, he reflects on all the men they'd lost and all the death and destruction they'd faced. He shares his thoughts with Gale.

"We're leaving a lot of good men behind."

Gale is quiet for a moment. "A lotta' brave men."

"Yeah," he replies with the same quietness.

John and Gale are the last two pilots to take off into the sky.

Just like John had said they'd be.

-

The next time John sees Gale and the boys is at Gale's bachelor party. Not because he hadn't wanted to before, but everybody had just been busy reuniting with long-missed family and friends. Well, everybody except John. John… he didn't really have any of that besides them.

He supposes that's why he'd been the one to end up with Meatball. The men all knew John needed him the most. And he loved that damn, howling husky. He'd been upset that he had to leave him back in Wisconsin.

The party is in full swing by the time John gets a moment alone with Gale. It's then that, for the first time in his life, he realizes that Gale Cleven is *tipsy*.

So much so the smaller man almost falls into him. John catches him by the waist and it makes Gale giggle. He doesn't think he'd ever heard the man *giggle* before. It's the most adorable thing he's ever heard.

"Someone's having fun," he teases.

Gale, unbelievably, hasn't pulled away from him yet. He looks up at him with glazed over eyes and a playful smile. “Aren’t you?”

John’s smile widens. “I am now.”

When Gale giggles again, he can smell the alcohol on his breath. He can almost taste it himself; that’s how close the two are.

For just a fleeting moment, Gale seems to sober up. He’s looking up at John so softly now that he starts to ache. “I- I missed ya’.”

If John Egan didn’t know better, he’d say Gale Cleven was looking at him with something that looked an awful lot like love.

John’s heart lurches. He tightens his hold on Gale’s waist. “Same,” he replies, voice hoarse from the raw emotion he’s feeling.

The night passes in a blissful blur of barely concealed touches between the two and for once, John doesn’t even feel the need to drink. He’s drunk on Gale Cleven.

Unfortunately, the little bubble he and Gale are in pops and snaps both back to reality when Marge and her friend join them around midnight. John can’t help the way his face visibly falls upon their entrance. He’s expecting it, but it still feels like he’s been stabbed when Gale immediately puts distance between them.

Marge, the beauty she always has been, glides up to them with a grace that would leave almost any man speechless. “Oh, John, it’s *so* nice to

see you again!" She gushes with a genuine smile that he can't bring himself to return. There's a mischievous look to her eyes, and she turns behind her. "Isn't is so nice to see him again?"

She steps aside to reveal her friend that John had gotten to know up close and personal right before him and Gale had been deployed all those months ago. It felt like it had been ages. It felt like a different lifetime.

"That it is," the friend says with a shy smile. John does his best to look pleased to see her. He isn't. He wishes the two women hadn't showed up at all.

"Let's leave them to catch up," Marge tells Gale, giving John a wink before taking her fiancé by the arm and leading him a little ways away. Gale doesn't look back at him.

"*Are you intoxicated, Mr. Cleven?"* He hears Marge say affectionately.

"*I might be,"* he hears Gale drawl back with what he can tell is a smile.

John does his best to tune them out after that. "I need a drink," he tells the brunette they'd left him with.

-

As that night had went on and John drank more, his discontent

became harder and harder to hide.

"Careful," comes a voice from his left. He turns to see Curt observing him with an all-too-understanding look in his eyes. "Yuh bein' really obvious."

John is too drunk to care to try and deny the damning allegation. "Am I?" He slurs with a self-depreciating smile on his face.

Curt looks sad for him. It makes him want to hit him. He turns away and downs his drink.

"I wanna dance," he exclaims, forcing fake enthusiasm into his voice. He pushes himself up with a dramatic flourish.

He finds the brunette he'd abandoned earlier in the night and wraps his arms around her slim waist from behind. "*Dance with me,"* he breathes in her ear.

He watches with satisfaction as she falls for his charm, and he wastes no time in whisking her away onto the dance floor.

Gale and Marge were already there swaying to the music. John would be lying if he tried to claim he hadn't already noticed this, his eyes had been on Gale all night, and he'd be lying if he said he wasn't purposely placing him and his dance partner right next to the two.

"If it isn't the happy couple," John says. The sarcasm in his voice is thinly veiled. Gale's head whips around to face him, eyes wide with shock for a second before he watches the blond school his face. "Don't worry, we aren't here to interrupt. I just couldn't let the night end

without dancing with this beautiful friend of yours."

He doesn't even spare a glance at the girl he's referring to, keeping his eyes fixated directly on Gale. He sees the younger man's jaw clench.

"Isn't that sweet," Marge coos.

John crinkles his eyes. His smile is unauthentic and empty. "I'm sweet as sugar."

His new female friend draws his attention to her, pulling him close. He lets her. John genuinely does try his best to focus on her for at least one dance because she was, sadly, a very nice girl who didn't deserve the way he was using her. He fails at this. His gaze is inevitably drawn back to Gale and Marge who have drifted to the opposite end of the dance floor.

And, to his sick delight, he finds that Gale is already watching them intently from over Marge's shoulder.

He can't read the twisted expression on Buck's face, but he wants to tell himself it's jealousy. John winks at him. Gale looks away.

Then Marge pulls Buck into a long kiss, and John doesn't find this charade funny anymore. "Let's get some air," he tells Marge's friend in a flat tone.

-

John honestly hadn't planned on fooling around when he'd asked his companion to step outside with him. He'd just wanted out of that damn room, and he felt bad about abandoning her again.

She, however, has other ideas, and John is only human. She throws her arms around him and kisses him, and John is happy for the distraction. He deepens it.

Next thing he knows, he's being pulled to the side of the pub and the undeniably attractive woman sinks to her knees. "*Fuck,"* he whispers lustfully. He hadn't expected this at all, but he isn't complaining. He threads his hands through her hair as she unbuttons his buckle with her slender, feminine hands.

He does his best to not wish they were someone else's hands- more masculine hands.

She takes him into her mouth, and John moans in pleasure. He hadn't been touched this way in a *long* time. He uses the placement of his hands to move her head up and down his cock.

He hears someone stumble into the alleyway but the girl doesn't stop in her sucking. She's so into it, so into pleasuring him, he's sure she hadn't even noticed the footsteps.

While being caught in the act didn't really phase him, it had happened many times before, he still looks up to see who had found them.

He doesn't expect to see Gale Cleven.

He *really* doesn't expect how much it turns him on to know his best friend was witnessing him like this.

His cock throbs, and the poor girl hums happily, thinking it was her touch that had caused that reaction.

But all he's thinking is *Gale, Gale, Gale. Buck.*

Gale is frozen in place, jaw dropped in shock. Bucky expects him to run back inside, but Gale stays right where he is. The look he has on his face is the exact one he'd had when they'd been in that tree trunk. The look on his face is one of *want.*

John lets out another moan, but this one is *much* louder than the first one. Gale's face turns beat red at the promiscuous sound. John swears he sees him lick his lips.

His cock is so hard he can barely stand it. Marge's friend starts to suck on him with even more enthusiasm, and John gets rougher in his movements with her. "*So good,"* he groans in ecstasy.

John wants to give Gale a *show.*

Without breaking eye contact with Gale, he pulls his cock out of the girl's puckered mouth and smacks her face with it. He strokes himself a few times and he sees Gale's adam's apple visibly bob and his hands twitch at his sides, like he's restraining himself from something.

He slides himself back between the girl's soft lips and he imagines that

they're Gale's instead this time.

The thought drives him *wild.*

John pushes himself so far back into the girl's throat that she gags. He should probably be being more gentle, but the thought of it being Gale's pretty mouth wrapped around him right now has him losing control.

It's only as he feels himself reaching his climax that he pulls his eyes away from Gale and shuts them tight as his hips shutter and his cum spills into the eager mouth of Marge's friend.

When he opens them again, Gale is gone.

John, for once, doesn't go after him.

He didn't think it would change the events that would inevitably be taking place in some church in just a few weeks if he did.

(It might've.)

-

Chapter Five Summary/Peek:

“If things were different,” He swallowed hard and his mouth went dry with dread, but he had to ask. He had to know. “If there was a place where- where it didn't matter…”

He felt the blissful ignorance of the silence between them shatter like glass at his words. Buck froze in his movements. John’s grip on the front of his suit tightened. He didn’t let go when Gale tried to take a step back. He couldn’t just yet. He could feel Buck’s heart pounding through his pressed dress shirt and he closed his eyes to focus on the strong, now unsteady beats.

“Would you be with me?"

"That place doesn't exist, John.”

Chapter End Notes

IT’S WEDDING TIME BABY !!!

Are you scared? You should be.

Kidding, kidding. Kind of.

Also i could not remember Marge’s friends name for the LIFE of me or if she even had one? If you know it drop it below but that’s why she’s referred to as “girl” or just “Marge’s friend” so many times lol.

Thank you guys for all of your comments, they motivate me to post as frequently as I do because I love your enthusiasm!! <3

Chapter 6: there's the silence, there's my last chance

Chapter Summary

> "If things were different," He swallowed hard and his mouth went dry with dread, but he had to ask. He had to know. "If there was a place where-where it didn't matter…"
>
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>
> "Would you be with me?"

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

song i listened to while writing/the chapter is named after: speak now by taylor swift (because duh what else)

-

Bucky really, *really* thought he knew what real pain felt like at this point.

But all the beatings he'd took, all the awful things he'd felt, didn't hold a candle to the sickness he felt as he helped Gale Cleven get ready to marry somebody that wasn't him.

Men don’t marry men.

And there was nothing John Egan would ever be able to do to change that.

He reached up with trembling hands to straighten out the lapels of Buck’s black and white suit while the younger man quietly fixed his cuffs links. They were close enough that Gale’s cologne was making his head spin.

“If things were different,” He swallowed hard and his mouth went dry with dread, but he had to ask. He had to know. “If there was a place where-where it didn't matter…”

He felt the blissful ignorance of the silence between them shatter like glass at his words. Buck froze in his movements. John’s grip on the front of his suit tightened. He didn’t let go when Gale tried to take a step back. He couldn’t just yet. He could feel Buck’s heart pounding through his pressed dress shirt and he closed his eyes to focus on the strong, now unsteady beats.

“Would you be with me?"

The quiet that followed his question was deafening. He could hear his blood pumping in his ears.

He opens his eyes slowly, like a scared child.

Gale is looking at him with so much pain you’d think he’d been gutted.

"That place doesn't exist, John."

John's fingers curls more around his collar. "But if it *did,"* he persists, feeling more desperate than he ever had in his entire life.

Gale isn't looking at him now. He brings his own hands up to clasp John's around the wrist to remove them, and John numbly lets him.

"I-I have to go. We have to go," Gale says with a defeated tremor in his voice. His fingers are still wrapped around John's wrists that had fell between them. It burned where they were touching. "The ceremony is gonna be startin' soon."

Then Gale releases him and it feels like the end. And John Egan, unlike Gale had always tried to be, wasn't a man of honor or a man of morals. He'd never claimed to be, and he'd be damned if he started to right now.

"I love you."

He sees Gale's shoulders tense up and his hand stop halfway through turning the doorknob. John licks his lips nervously, but this was his last chance to make Gale hear him. He knew after today he could never bring it up again.

"I've loved you ever since I gave you my name," he rasps, barely breathing at this point. "And if you go up there today… if you- if you say yes, and give someone else yours, I will still love you. I couldn't stop if I tried. I'll love you until the day I die."

Gale hasn't moved a single muscle. The weight of the words John's about to say feel like they might crush him.

Like it just might crush the both of them and turn them to dust.

"And I think- I think you love me, too."

He sees Gale's knuckles turning white from how hard he's gripping the handle of the door now.

"Just say it," he pleads with his friend. "Say it just this one time."

When Gale turns around suddenly and starts to take long, purposeful strides across the room towards him, John thinks he's about to punch him.

He closes his eyes in preparation for the blow.

Instead, Gale smashes their lips together with such an intensity it sends them both stumbling backwards until the back of John's legs hit a table. He gasps in surprise and Gale doesn't hesitate to take the opportunity to lick into his mouth.

His friend pulls back, lips red and already looking swollen from the aggression. "Goddamnit, Egan, fuckin' kiss me," he grits frustratedly.

John doesn't need to be told twice.

He pulls Gale's face down to his like a man starving. He flips them around so it's Gale pushed up against the desk instead of him, and the little whine that slips out of Gale when he does goes straight to his groin.

He is undone.

Their kisses at first are a bruising, sloppy clash of teeth. Gale's calloused hands are moving frantically under his shirt, running up his chest, tearing at his back, tearing at every part of him. Both men grab at each other like they're afraid the other might disappear from their arms at any second. He brings his clammy hands to both sides of Gale's face to slow the other man down, to help them find their rhythm, and when they do it's like fireworks are going off behind his eyes.

John nudges Gale's legs apart and he slots himself between them. The smaller man lets out another soft whine at the way the hardness in both of their pants rub together through the fabric, wrapping his legs around John's waist to urge him closer. He curses, because he didn't expect Gale to sound like *this:* so needy, so pitiful, so *unlike* the Major Gale Cleven the rest of the world knew. Gale is rutting up against him like a goddamn teenager, for fuck's sake, but he's not complaining, because the friction has him on a high like he's never been.

The world could end right now and he wouldn't care. The sensation of his best friend's body against his own is everything he'd dreamed it would be and so much more.

"Fuck me," Gale suddenly breathes heatedly into John's mouth.

Oh, God.

“I don’t-“ John’s cut off by another fierce kiss, the two having been only pulling back when air was an unavoidable need. “-I don’t know how.”

The way Gale is digging his fingernails into John’s back is definitely enough to be drawing blood, but John can’t bring himself to care. In fact, he hopes it scars. He never wants to forget how this felt; never wants to forget how bad Gale wanted him in this moment. Gale rips their lips apart to look up at him from where he’s sprawled on the desk with a dazed but determined look on his face.

“Figure it out, Major,” he demands, the strength of his voice a foil to how absolutely ruined he looked, before surging up to meet John in another head-spinning kiss.

He’s so hard he thinks his zipper might literally *pop.* Gale’s then fumbling with his belt, and his cock springs out enthusiastically. And then Gale Cleven, *King Cleven*, drops to his knees for John.

He feels like a man with a newfound religion.

The moan he lets out when he feels that perfect, perfect mouth he’d spent so many nights thinking about wrap around his head is almost embarrassing. “Oh, *Gale*.”

Gale whimpers around his cock at the utterance of his name. The way Gale moves his mouth around him is sloppy and unpracticed, but you’d think it’s the last thing Gale is ever going to do by the enthusiasm he sucks on John with. He feels precum running from his tip and it takes *everything* in him to pull the beautiful blond off of him.

But he can tell he isn’t going to last long this way, and Gale had asked him for something. And John, he would never deny Gale *anything*. He

would serve him the universe on a silver platter, if only Gale would let him. And this might be his only chance to give Gale *this*, so he is going to give the man everything he's been holding back all these years.

"*Turn around,"* John all but growls now. He can barely contain himself, boiling over with the want he's spent so much time pushing away.

Gale obeys him immediately and braces himself on the desk as John rips his black dress pants down to his ankles. He runs his hands over the newly exposed skin of Gale's buttocks and toned thighs, feeling Gale tremble beneath his touch, and his own hands are shaking, too. Both from pleasure, partly from awe, and also fear. He leans forward, pressing the length of their bodies together to be able to speak into his friend's ear huskily.

"Spit in my hand, baby," he murmurs as he places his cupped fingers in front of Gale's mouth. Gale does as he's told without any questions, and John presses a kiss to the nape of his neck in praise.

Then, the feeling of slicking his friend's saliva over his cock as he lines them up is filthy in the most *glorious* way.

He places his hands firmly on Gale's hips, and suddenly he's having doubts, because he doesn't want to *hurt* Gale and he feels like they're skipping some steps, but then it's Gale who pushes himself down onto John without warning. John doesn't even recognize the sound that comes out of him as human.

The sound that comes from Gale is somehow even *more* ravaged. For a second, John is afraid he's hurting him. He tries to pull out, but one of Gale's hands fly back to keep him in place.

”D-don’t stop,” Gale tells him, voice wrecked and broken. He barely pauses to adjust to John’s length, moving up and down fluidly, mindlessly, before John can contest.

And John doesn’t even know if they’re doing this right, in fact he’s almost sure they aren’t, but lord he has never felt so complete in his life as he did in this moment buried to the hilt inside of his best friend. He wants to tell Gale that he doubts he could stop even if he wanted to.

When it comes to Gale, he’s almost always been powerless. He’s completely at the other man’s mercy. Buck says jump, Bucky asks how high.

Like a goddamn dog.

But right now, he doesn’t mind being Gale’s dog, because Gale is finally letting him in the bed, and he’s spent so long chained up outside.

So, *so* long.

John reaches up to hold one of Gale’s hands that grip the desk, the other still planted firmly on the man’s hips as he thrusts. Gale, unexpectedly, threads their fingers together. The intimacy of it has John dropping his head down to rest against the back of Gale’s and pressing more desperate kisses there.

“I’ve wanted this the day I saw you at basic, Buck,” he murmurs into the man’s ear between pants, hips snapping away rhythmically.

Gale says nothing in return, eyelids screwed shut and eyebrows drawn together, but the way his lips fall open even more and how tightly he squeezes John's hand after lets the older man know that the sentiment is so, so vehemently returned, and that it always has been.

He reaches around Gale to wrap his hand firmly around the man's cock. He wants to feel Gale's tight hole contract around him as they both go over the edge together. He *needs* it. He's never needed anything more.

He strokes Buck as his motions become more irregular the closer he gets and relishes in every sinful sound that spills from the man's mouth. He feels the warmth of Gale's seed pour over his fist, and he lets out one final moan of utter, raw passion before his hips stutter and he's filling Gale to the brim.

When it's over and both men have caught their breath, John pulls out of Gale slowly. He doesn't know what comes next. He's afraid of what comes next.

Gale, without turning around, rises from his bent position and pulls his pants up from around his ankles quietly. John, with a lump the size of a rock in his throat, follows his lead and puts himself away. They'd been too caught up in the moment to remove any of their clothes fully besides Gale's pants.

For a second, he thinks Gale might leave without saying anything or even looking at him. He's never felt more relieved in his life than when the blond turns to face him.

The feeling is immediately replaced with that same dread from earlier when he sees the hopeless look of sadness written all over his friend's face.

”I- I do love you, John. I’m sorry I never had the guts to say it before. I know that it’s- it’s too late now,” Gale whispers so quietly and brokenly that John thinks he might be imagining it. “But I did. I do, for whatever it’s worth. I always have.”

He feels like someone has dumped an entire bucket of ice water over his head.

“It’s *not* too late,” John tries to argue as Gale makes his way to the door, reaching for him and missing because Gale’s gone almost before he can even get the words out. He’s left alone so suddenly, it’s almost like Gale had never even been there at all.

John brings weak fingers to his bruised lips to assure himself that it *had* been real.

-

As Gale and Marge exchange their vows, John has to fight the urge to throw up from his place beside them on the altar. He watches Gale’s lips move with agony- the lips that had been so pliable and soft between his own not even thirty minutes prior.

Right one cue, the preacher turns to the audience.

“*If anyone can show just cause as to why they may not be lawfully wed, speak now or forever hold your peace.”*

John is sweating. What would happen, he thinks, if he stepped forward from his spot as Gale's best man and objected? He imagines the horrified looks of everybody in the room.

There's two separate hands tugging at each of his sleeves, and he looks to both sides of him to see both Rosie and Curt subtly shaking their heads. *Don't*, their eyes warn.

John wants to laugh. He wants to cry. Had he really been that obvious this whole time? How long had *both* of them known? How many people had figured him out?

He supposes it doesn't really matter anymore. Nothing he had ever felt for Gale, or Gale had felt for him, was about to matter.

He feels Curt let go of his shirt and give a quick squeeze to his hand that he hadn't even noticed was shaking something awful. He smiles sadly at his friend, feeling grateful.

I know, he wanted to tell them. Because he'd always known, really. He'd just been selfishly running from it for a very long time in hopes that if he ran fast enough, he could escape it.

But the painful, unavoidable truth was that there was no way for him and Gale to ever be together in this world. No matter how badly they may have wanted to be.

He's pulled from his thoughts when there's a soft *clink* that somehow echoes throughout the room like a gunshot.

Gale, upon trying to slide it onto Marge's fingers, had dropped the ring.

John, without thinking, bends down to pick it up. Gale goes to do this at the same time and their hands meet in the middle. There's a literal shock between the two of them at the touch. His breath catches in his throat, and he looks up to see Gale's face just inches away from his.

There's a message in Gale's eyes. *I'm sorry, I wish things were different*, they seem to beg. *Please forgive me.*

The preacher clears his throat and both men flinch away from one another. Marge is looking between two of them with worried eyes. Gale, a professional at breaking John's heart at this point, scoops up the ring and leaves John on the floor.

"Butterfingers," he jokes with a light chuckle.

He wonders if it sounded as forced to everyone else as it did to him.

He rises, brushes himself off with as much dignity as he can muster, and lets out a forced laugh of his own. Marge gives him a smile as he walks back over to where Curt, Rosie and Crosby are waiting for him.

And then John watches as the man he'd always loved like he'd been made to, his Gale, marries somebody who isn't him.

Gale, in the end, was always going to marry Marge.

There was no other ending. There was no other place.

John finds himself wishing once again that Gale had just let him die in that Stalag.

-

Chapter End Notes

DON'T HATE ME. This ending just felt right <3

however, i did write two other endings one which is even sadder but one that is a happy one. A previous commenter asked me to post the alternative ones which if it's wanted i will put the finishing touches on them and post as separate stories/one-shots and we can think of it as like a multiverse lol. This is, unfortunately at least in this story, their ending.

ive loved all of your comments, please leave more of your thoughts! thank you for coming on this journey with me.

Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!